



As part of our vision to be a positive force for change, we've produced a series of factsheets to help our customers better understand sustainability issues, and what we're doing about them.

Overview

Antibiotics play an essential role in treating bacterial infections in animals. However, the routine or 'blanket' use of antibiotics for livestock is a major contributor to the global challenge of antimicrobial resistance (AMR), which reduces the effectiveness of antibiotics in both human and veterinary medicine and is an urgent global health crisis (WHO). Responsible antibiotic use is therefore crucial - if we're to be able to rely on antibiotics in the future.



What's the problem?

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is recognised by the World Health Organization as one of the biggest global public health threats. The overuse and misuse of antibiotics in both human medicine and food production accelerates the development of resistant bacteria, meaning common infections can become harder — and sometimes impossible — to treat.

In livestock systems, antibiotics may be used to treat illness, but historically they have also been administered prophylactically to groups of animals to prevent disease or to compensate for poor housing, hygiene or management practices. In some parts of the world, antibiotics have been used for growth promotion. While growth-promoting antibiotics are banned in the UK and EU, practices vary globally, and supply chains can be complex.

The development of resistant bacteria in animals can pose risks beyond the farm. Resistant strains can spread through the food chain, direct contact, or the wider environment via water, soil and manure. This creates broader environmental and societal impacts, affecting human healthcare systems and increasing treatment costs.

Overreliance on antibiotics can also mask underlying welfare challenges. Systems that depend on routine medication rather than good husbandry, appropriate stocking densities, enrichment and biosecurity may fail to address root causes of disease. Reducing unnecessary antibiotic use therefore goes hand-in-hand with improving animal welfare standards and strengthening farm resilience.

Our targets and plans

Responsible antibiotic use supports better animal health and welfare, reduces the risk of antibiotic residues in food, and helps safeguard public health by contributing to the global effort to combat antimicrobial resistance.

As part of our broader farm animal welfare policy, we aim to increase transparency and reporting across supply chains on key criteria including antibiotic use alongside animal welfare, transport, housing and slaughter practices.

Jargon buster

Antibiotics: Medicines used to treat bacterial infections in humans and animals. They do not work against viruses.

Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR): When bacteria evolve so that antibiotics no longer work effectively against them, making infections harder to treat.

Prophylactic Use: The use of antibiotics to prevent disease rather than treat an existing illness. Responsible use guidance aims to limit routine prophylactic use.

Livestock system: the way farm animals are bred, reared, managed and brought to market within a structured production setup.

What can you do?

For food businesses, responsible antibiotic use is an increasingly important part of sustainable sourcing. Customers, regulators and investors expect clear oversight, transparent reporting and alignment with national and international strategies to address antimicrobial resistance. Robust antibiotic management is therefore a key element of building resilient and responsible livestock supply chains.

You can:

- Engage suppliers on their antibiotic policies, governance and data reporting
- Prioritise suppliers that demonstrate clear stewardship practices and credible third-party assurance
- Encourage improvements in animal health through strong husbandry, biosecurity and disease prevention measures

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